



Guide to Food Dates & Extensions



Table of Contents

Types of Dates.....	3
Shelf-Stable Products.....	4
Refrigerated Food.....	7
Frozen Food.....	8
Fresh Produce.....	9
References.....	10

Food Bank For New York City receives donations of many products with code dates that have passed or are quickly approaching. Dates are issued by manufacturers to ensure the highest quality, and in most cases, are not reflective of product safety. Because consumers will often choose not to buy these items, they are donated to Food Bank near or after the date on the package. Food Bank’s warehouse team sorts through all donations and checks dates, applying the appropriate extensions as indicated in this guide. Should you receive a product with a code date that has passed, please consult this guide for the extension before contacting Food Bank to discuss returning the product.

This guide contains recommendations for product date extensions based on ideal storage conditions and package integrity.

Types of Dates

Many foods can be distributed and used well past the date on the package (code date) if handled and stored appropriately. There are several different types of dates on the packages which are explained in the table below. Understanding the meanings of these dates can help you determine if foods in your soup kitchen or food pantry are still good.

Type of Date	Example	Found On	What It Means
Expiration Date	Expires 5/15/17 Do not use after 5/15/17	Baby food, infant formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, baking powder	Baby food, infant formula, and over-the-counter medicines are the only products that are required by law to have expiration dates. These items should NOT be distributed or used past this date. Yeast and baking powder do not work as well after their expiration date, but are still safe to use.
Pack Date	Packed on 5/15/17 22:5306412 KL064	Canned food, crackers, cookies, spices	Manufacturer's code not meant to be used by the general public. Often paired with a best by date.
Sell By Date	Sell by 6/1/17	Refrigerated foods – milk, yogurt, cheese, eggs, lunch meat, packaged salad mixes	This is the date that the store must sell the food by before pulling it from the shelves. Stores often donate food when they are close to the sell by date. If the food has been handled properly, it is still safe to eat and the quality is good.
Use By Date	Use By 5/29/17 Best Before 5/29/17 Best If Used By 5/29/17	Crackers, cookies, cold cereals, other dry/shelf-stable food	This date is the manufacturer's recommendation for ensuring food is at peak quality. After the use by date has passed, the food is safe to eat but nutrients and quality begin to slowly decrease.

Shelf-Stable Products

Most dry/shelf-stable products are edible long past their code dates. Remember to examine the packaging, as the extensions in this guide are based on packaging that has not been damaged.

Do not distribute or consume cans or jars if they are/have:

- Leaking or stained
- Swollen
- Rusty
- Sharply dented, or dented along the seams
- Cracked
- Missing label
- Foul odor
- Missing or broken safety seal
- Loose or missing lid
- Change in color or odor of the food item



Do not distribute or consume boxes if:

- Inside bag is torn or leaking, has moldy or foreign objects inside, or seals are ripped
- Box (if product does not have an internal bag) is open or torn, has live or dead insects/webs/droppings, is stained or wet

Tips for storing canned and boxed foods:

- Store cans and boxes 6 inches off the floor (on a pallet or shelf) and away from the wall for circulation
- Store canned and boxed goods in a cool, dry space
- Always date and rotate stock – First In First Out (FIFO)

Tips for storing bagged grains:

- Keep bags of grains (rice, polenta, oatmeal, pasta, granola, grits, cream of wheat, etc.) in plastic bins. Pests love these items and can easily bite through thin, plastic bags or paper packaging.

Shelf-Stable Foods	Shelf-Life <u>After</u> Code Date
Aseptically Packaged Products	
Broth: beef, chicken, vegetable	3 years
Soup	3 years
Fruit or vegetables	3 years
Baby Food	
Cereal, food, formula	Expiration date on package
Beverages/Mixes – shelf-stable <u>only</u>	
Carbonated drinks	1 year
Coffee, hot chocolate	2 years
Coffee creamer	18 months
Instant breakfast	6 months
Juice	1 year
Milk (UHT)	1 year
Nutrition aid supplements	1 year
Rice milk, soy milk	6 months
Tea	3 years
Water	Indefinite – always store in a cool, dark place away from chemicals
Canned Foods	
<u>High-Acid Foods</u> (fruit, applesauce, juice, pickles, sauerkraut, baked beans w/ mustard & vinegar, tomatoes, tomato-based soups)	2 years
<u>Low-Acid Foods</u> (gravy, non-tomato-based soup/broth, pasta, stews, cream sauces, vegetables other than tomatoes, beans, fish, meat)	4 years
Condiments, sauces, syrups	
BBQ sauce	1 year
Frosting	1 year
Gravy (dry mix envelopes)	2 years
Honey, molasses, syrups	2 years
Jams, jellies, preserves	18 months
Ketchup, cocktail/chili sauce, salsa	18 months
Mayonnaise	6 months
Mustard, pickles, relish	2 years
Olives	2 years
Salad dressings	1 year
Spaghetti sauce	18 months
Vinegar	2 years
Worcestershire sauce	2 years

Dry Goods	
Baking mixes	1 year
Baking powder/soda	3 years; may be less effective
Bars (i.e. granola, protein, cereal)	18 months
Beans and lentils, dried	3 years
Bouillon cubes	2 years
Breads, cakes (commercially prepared, room temperature)	5 days
Candy	3 years
Casserole mix	1 year
Cereal (hot or cold)	1 year
Cookies, crackers, pretzels	1 year
Cornmeal	1 year
Flour	1 year
Fruit, dried	1 year
Macaroni & cheese mix	3 years
Nuts	1 year
Nut oils	6 months
Oils (olive, vegetable, canola)	2 years
Pasta, dry	3 years
Peanut butter	2 years
Popcorn (kernels or microwave bags)	2 years
Popcorn, commercially popped and bagged	1 year
Potato chips	1 year
Potatoes (mashed, instant flakes)	2 years
Rice (white or brown)	3 years
Rice mixes	6 months
Shortening	1 year
Spices	3 years
Stuffing mix	1 year
Sugar	3 years
Toaster pastries	1 year
Tortillas/wraps	3 months



Refrigerated Food

Tips for storing refrigerated food:

- Keep all chilled food refrigerated at or below 41° F.
- Leave space for air to circulate between items in the refrigerator.
- Keep raw meats, poultry or fish on the bottom shelf and ready-to-eat food on top to avoid dangerous cross contamination from drips.
- Rotate stock so older foods can be distributed first.



Refrigerated Foods	Shelf-Life <u>After</u> Code Date if stored in the <u>REFRIGERATOR</u>
Butter	3 months
Buttermilk	10-14 days
Cheese (soft – cottage, ricotta, cream cheese)	2 weeks
Cheese (hard – parmesan, blocks of cheese)	6 months
Cheese (processed – slices/shredded)	3-4 weeks
Coffee creamer (liquid)	3 weeks
Cream	1 week
Eggs (in shell)	1 month
Eggs (pasteurized; substitute or real eggs)	10 days
Fruit, cut	4 days
Guacamole, hummus	1 week
Juice, purchased refrigerated	3 weeks
Margarine	6 months
Meat – poultry, ground beef, pork, fish, seafood, venison	2-5 days
Milk (not shelf-stable)	1 week
Pasta, fresh	2 days
Salads, prepared (macaroni, tuna, egg, potato)	2 days
Sour cream	3 weeks
Whipped cream, aerosol	2 months
Yogurt	4-6 weeks

Frozen Food

Most food can be kept indefinitely if it remains continuously frozen at or below 0°F, although the quality will slowly deteriorate over time.



Tips for storing frozen food:

- Keep all frozen food at or below 0° F until distribution.
- Leave meat, poultry, and seafood in the original packaging when distributing. It is unsafe to open and repack these foods.
- Do not accept frozen foods that have ice crystals or frozen liquids- this is evidence of the food being previously thawed and then refrozen. Freezer burn does not make food unsafe- it appears as grayish-brown leathery spots and just means air came in contact with the food.
- Meat should not be thawed and refrozen. Once meat is thawed, use it according to the information in following table.
- Most foods can be frozen indefinitely, but some foods do not freeze well. These foods include mayonnaise, cream sauce, yogurt, cheese, sour cream, milk and lettuce. Raw meat and poultry will maintain their quality longer when frozen than cooked meat and poultry because moisture is lost during cooking.
- Items that should not be frozen are canned foods, shell eggs, and aerosol cans.

Safe thawing: Never thaw foods at room temperature! Bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature and can make your food dangerous to eat. You can thaw food safely in the refrigerator, in cold water and in the microwave.

Frozen Food	Recommended Maximum Time to Store Frozen Item in the Refrigerator
Bacon, ham, lunch meats, hot dogs, pepperoni (unopened)	2 weeks
Desserts	1 week
Dinners, prepared	1 week
Dough, bread, bagels	1 week
Fruit and juice concentrate	1 week
Meat and fish, cooked	4 days
Meat and fish, raw	2 days
Soy meat substitutes	4 days
Vegetables	1 week
Waffles, pancakes	1 week

Fresh Produce

Tips for storing fresh produce:

- Most fruits and vegetables have the best quality when kept refrigerated. There are, however, some exceptions:
 - Tomatoes taste best if *not* refrigerated. Cold storage can cause them to become mealy.
 - Bananas should not be refrigerated unless fully ripe, and then they should be used within 1-2 days. Refrigeration will cause banana skin to blacken, but the fruit will not ripen while cold.
 - Unripe apples, mangoes, and stone fruits (plums, peaches, etc.) can be stored at room temperature, but these items should be refrigerated as they ripen.
 - Hardy vegetables like onions, garlic, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and winter squash should be stored in cool, dark places outside of the refrigerator.
- Never store produce below meat or fish in the refrigerator. Raw meat and fish can contaminate produce that is stored below it!
- If you have produce that is about to spoil, be creative! Use these options in your soup kitchen or encourage clients to use them if they are being offered in the pantry.
 - Brown bananas are perfect for banana bread
 - Apples can be made into applesauce
 - Tomatoes can be made into tomato sauce



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